

Timothy B. Tyson.
Blood Done Sign My Name.
New York: Crown Publishers, 2004.
355pp. \$24.00 ISBN 0-609-61058-9.

This review originally appeared in *North Carolina Libraries*, vol.63, no. 1, 2005

“Stories can have sharp edges,” states Tim Tyson in the Author’s Notes of *Blood Done Sign My Name*. Thirty years after hearing a 10 year old playmate tell him that his father and brother beat and killed Henry Marrow in public, Tyson examines the racial conflict and riots of Oxford, NC in 1970 and the culture that allowed such an event to take place and that allowed Robert and Roger Teel to be acquitted of both murder and manslaughter charges. The tensions of racial conflict and desegregation in Oxford were the same as those being felt throughout North Carolina and the rest of the South. *Blood Done Sign My Name* explores the motivation behind Marrow’s death and the riots afterwards.

Tyson does more in his novel than just cover the racial conflict of Oxford. He embarks on a journey of self-discovery to see how racism affected both Oxford and himself. Tim Tyson is a son of the late twentieth century South, and Oxford is a typical North Carolina small town. His father was a liberal Methodist minister who supported desegregation and worked towards a peaceful solution in Oxford. Tyson grew up in Oxford and knew the participants in the killing and resulting riots. By talking to the African-Americans who supported nonviolent methods to protest Marrow’s death and the African-Americans who used violence to force change, Tyson gains their perspectives on Marrow’s death, racism and segregation. Tyson also interviewed the Whites who took part in the killing and its investigation.

Tyson’s book is more than just a recounting of the events that spawned a riot 35 years ago; it is a book that makes the reader aware of the more subtle forms of racism that exist today. Tyson notes in the closing pages that “the enduring chasm of race is still with us, in some ways wider than ever.... White supremacy remains lethal, though most of its victims die more quietly than Henry Marrow.” The characteristics of the people described by Tyson, the white supremacists, and the moderates, liberals and radicals of both races still exist today. Readers will recognize people in their lives who embody these characteristics. The sharp edges of this story will cut but hopefully the cut will release the hidden prejudices of race so that healing can take place.

Tyson’s writes in a very accessible style. His firsthand knowledge of the racial, spiritual, and physical landscape freed the interviewees (Robert Teel, Mary Catherine Chavis, Ben Chavis, and others) to provide more information to him than they would to an unknown outsider. This insider knowledge allows Tyson to sketch characters that are more than their label of racist or militant, but people the reader can imagine, maybe even know, in their own hometown. Tyson also uses his father’s journals to get insights into the mood of the town and his father’s mind.

One problem with the *Blood Done Sign My Name* is there are no footnotes or bibliography. All of Tyson’s bibliographic information is included in a “Notes on Sources” chapter with a section for each chapter. While this lack of footnotes does not impact the readability of the text, it is a hindrance for researchers who may want to examine the original source material.

This book is recommended for all libraries.

Tim Tyson is a professor of African-American Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He earned his doctorate from Duke University. He has authored two other books. *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (1999) was the winner of the James Rawley Prize. Along with David S. Cecelski, Tyson co-authored *Democracy Betrayed: the Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 and its Legacy*.

— Robert Arndt
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